

Croce Dipinta by Giunta di Capitino, called Giunta Pisano, ca. 1250

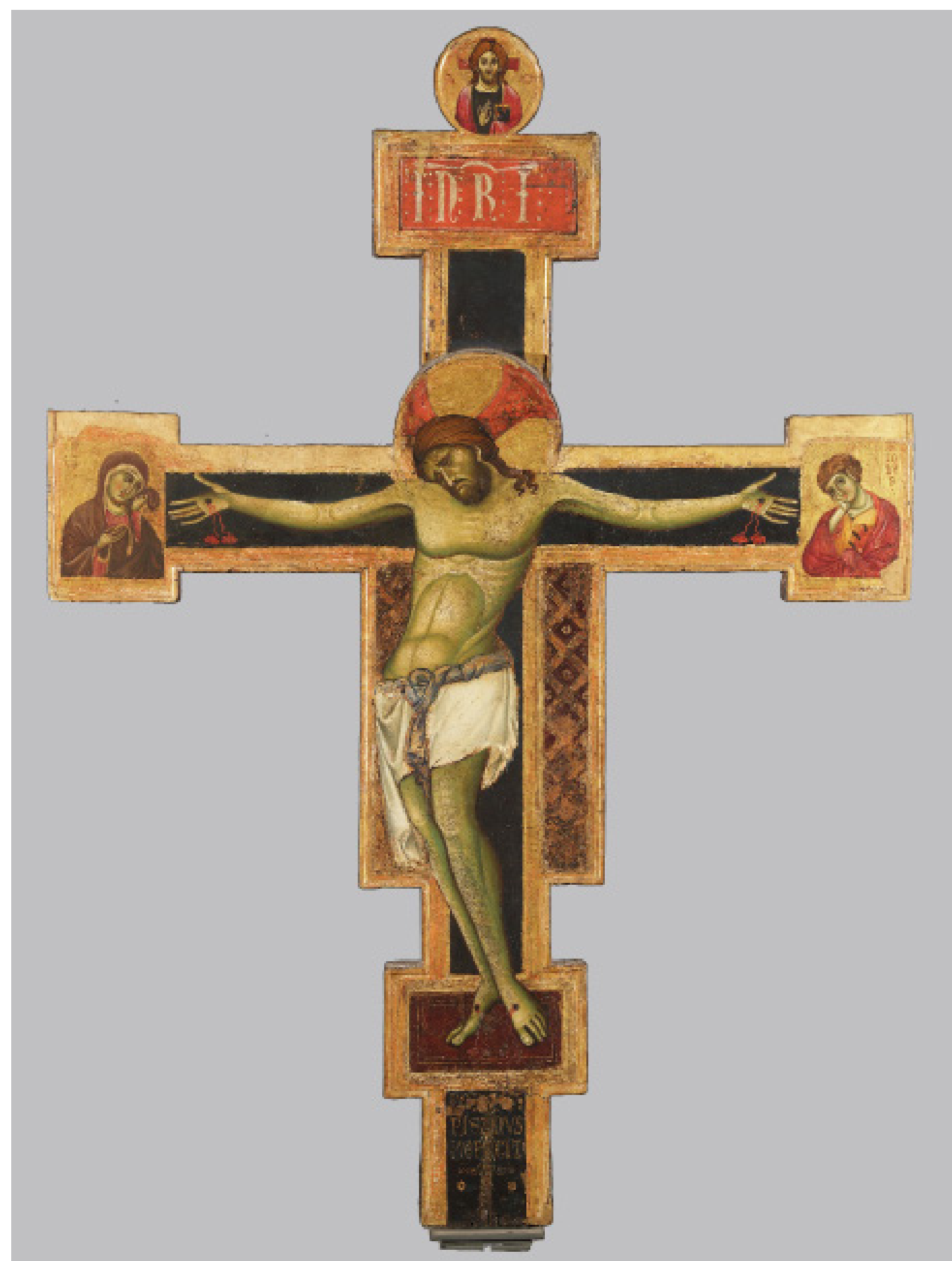
Provenance: Pisa, Chiesa di Sant'Anna, later Chiesa di San Ranierino, 185 x 135 cm

The Cross of Giunta Pisano



The cross arrived at the museum in 1948, from the church of San Ranierino (its last, but not original, location). It had been found in 1793 by the scholar Alessandro Da Morrona in the kitchen of the Monastery of Sant'Anna in Pisa, "*nell'alto di una parete, di fumo tinta, nella cucina del Monastero di Sant'Anna di Pisa*".

The discoverer is the first one to mention the name of the artist, who was previously completely unknown in art literature. He noticed the signature on the suppedaneum (IUNCTA PISANUS ME FECIT) and published the work in an engraving.



The signature on the suppedaneum
IUNCTA PISANUS ME FECIT

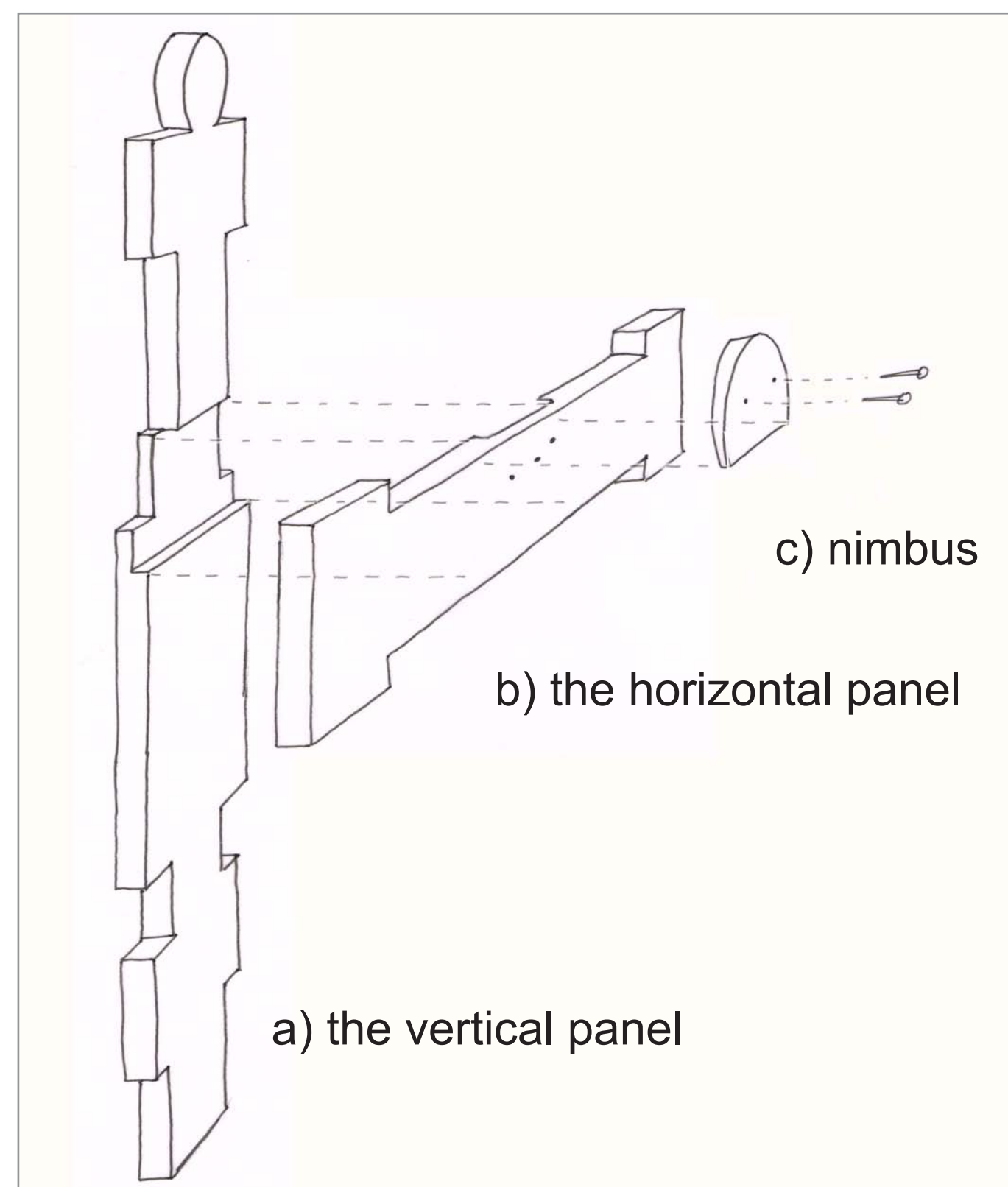


Christ is depicted according to the iconography of the *Christus Patiens*, emphasizing the characteristics of the suffering. The sacrifice of the incarnation, and therefore also the suffering during the Passion, are accentuated, reflecting the rising Franciscan spirituality.

Narrative scenes from the Passion are replaced with the imitation of an elegant fabric, focussing the attention on the body of Christ. The soft loincloth in white and blue describes a trapezoidal shape - shorter in the front - with an intricate knot that is twisted rather than tied. Of the iconographic tradition presenting complex figurative episodes only Mary, Saint John and Christ Blessing in the medallion are preserved. The painter was among the first to use chiaroscuro to build the form. The green background colour accentuates the dramaturgy of the death, giving the visual impression that we are dealing with a corpse.

The innovation in Giunta's imagery is based on a new interpretation of the contemporaneous Byzantine paintings. The cross, dated to the middle of the thirteenth century, is one of three surviving works bearing the artist's signature. It is therefore a cornerstone for the reconstruction of the artist's work as well as a fundamental testament to the painting of the thirteenth century.

Construction of the wooden cross



The cross is constructed of just three wooden elements: a vertical panel, a horizontal panel and the nimbus.

At the crossing point the horizontal panel is inserted into the vertical panel using an overlap joint, positioning the vertical board on the front of the cross. The connection is secured with glue, nails and wooden pegs. The nimbus is fixed on the vertical board with two nails.

Preparatory layers, engravings, and gilding

A canvas was applied over the entire surface of the cross. This mounting – which ensured damping of the movements of the wood and compensated for the inhomogenities of the surface – was coated with a primer of gypsum and glue. The primer was applied evenly across the wooden surface, including the sides of the cross. Later this layer was carefully honed, as common, and provided the ideal surface for painting and gilding.

The preliminary work of the underdrawing might have been done with charcoal.

The fine engravings, applied to the primer with a metal tip, had different functions in the execution of the cross:

- marking the areas to be gilded and those to be painted,
- drawing the nimbi and the outlines of the figures,
- designing the blue cross and decorative motifs on the panel using ruler and compass,
- decorating the nimbi with interlaced ornaments executed freehand.

The gold leaf was applied on a thin layer of red - almost orange - bole. The gilded surface was then polished in order to be more reflective and brighter.

The lateral panels

The lateral panels on the vertical board mimic a rich fabric with a decorative pattern composed of red squares, green bands and blue circles.

The strong colours and shiny lacquers were furthermore enriched with precious decorations in mordant gilding.

The imitated fabric with a decorative pattern of squares



Graphic reconstruction of the colours of the fabric and band with small lozenges



Croce Dipinta by Giunta di Capitino, called Giunta Pisano, ca. 1250

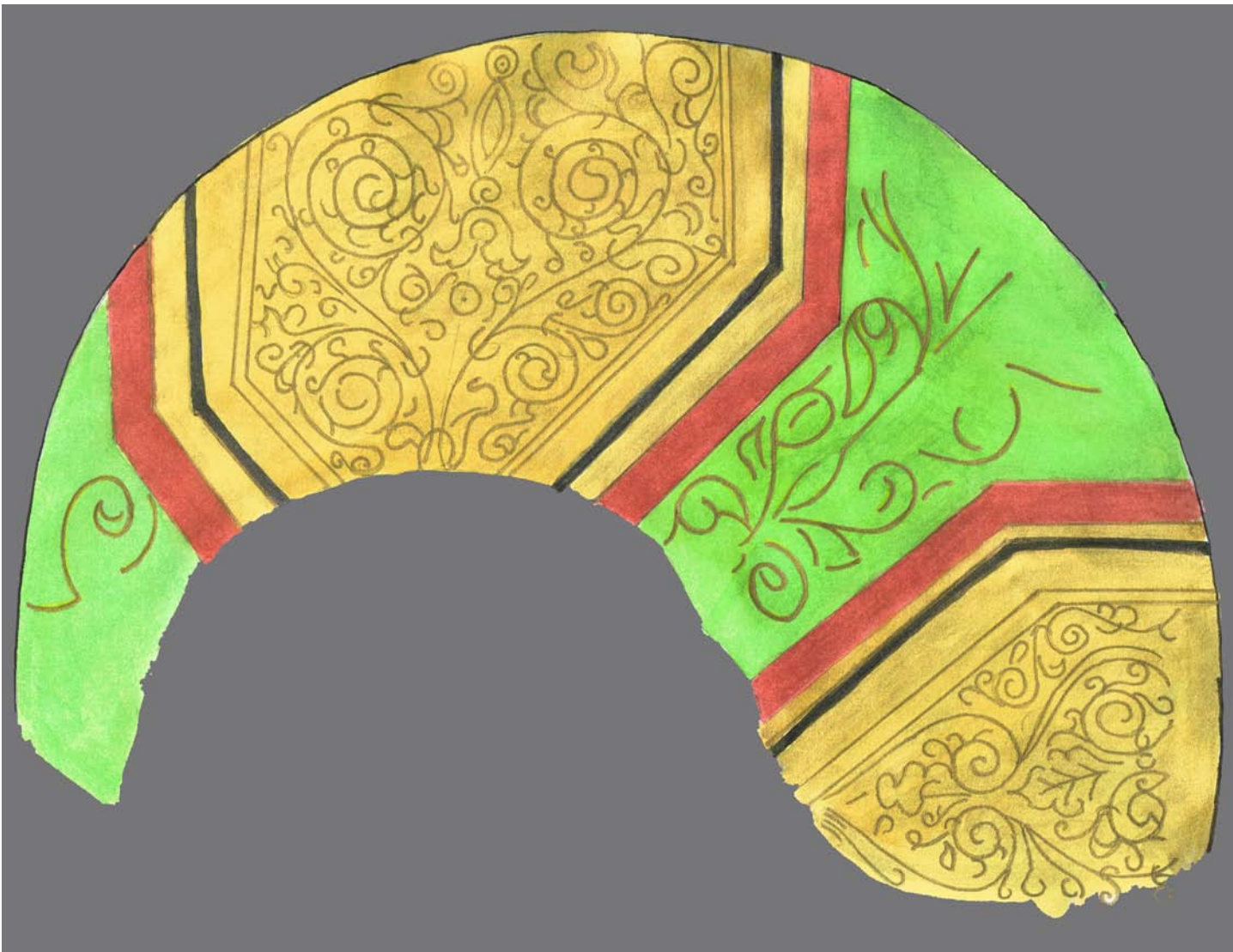
Provenance: Pisa, Chiesa di Sant'Anna, later Chiesa di San Ranierino, 185 x 135 cm

The nimbus

The nimbus shows the motif of the cross, the arms of which follow the axis of the head of Christ. The cross of the nimbus was lacquered green and outlined in red. The nimbus showed engraved floral ornaments in the golden fields. On the green areas the engraved floral ornaments were applied in gold.

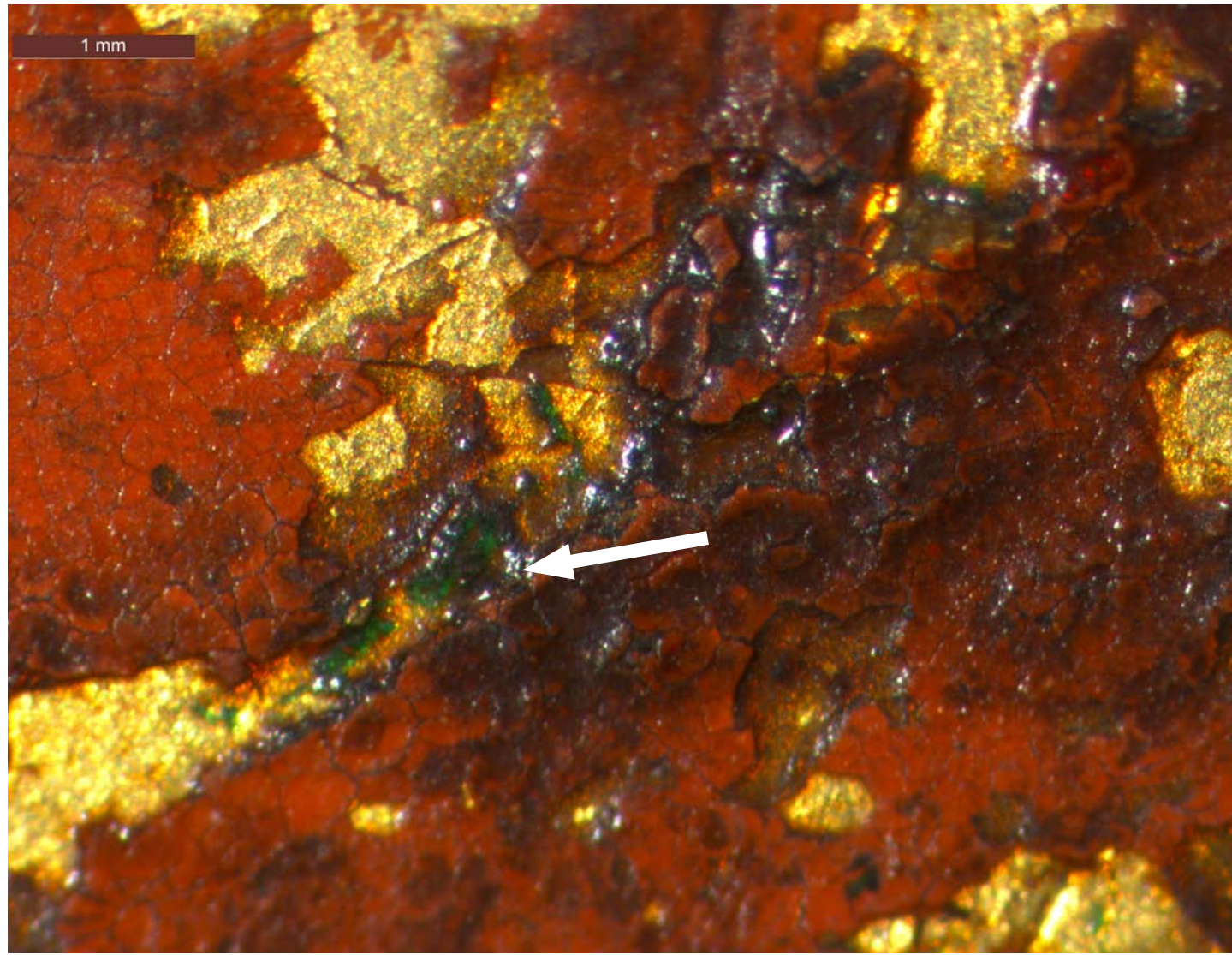


Red repainting within the nimbus



Graphic reconstruction of the nimbus

Underneath the red repainting, remains of green lacquer are visible under the microscope



The nimbus was enriched with engraved floral ornaments in the golden fields



The blue cross

The blue cross was painted very painstakingly, using four sequential paint layers of different blue colourants. Two layers of lead white mixed with indigo (1, 2) and a layer of azurite (3) were finally coated by the painter with a layer of ultramarine blue (4).

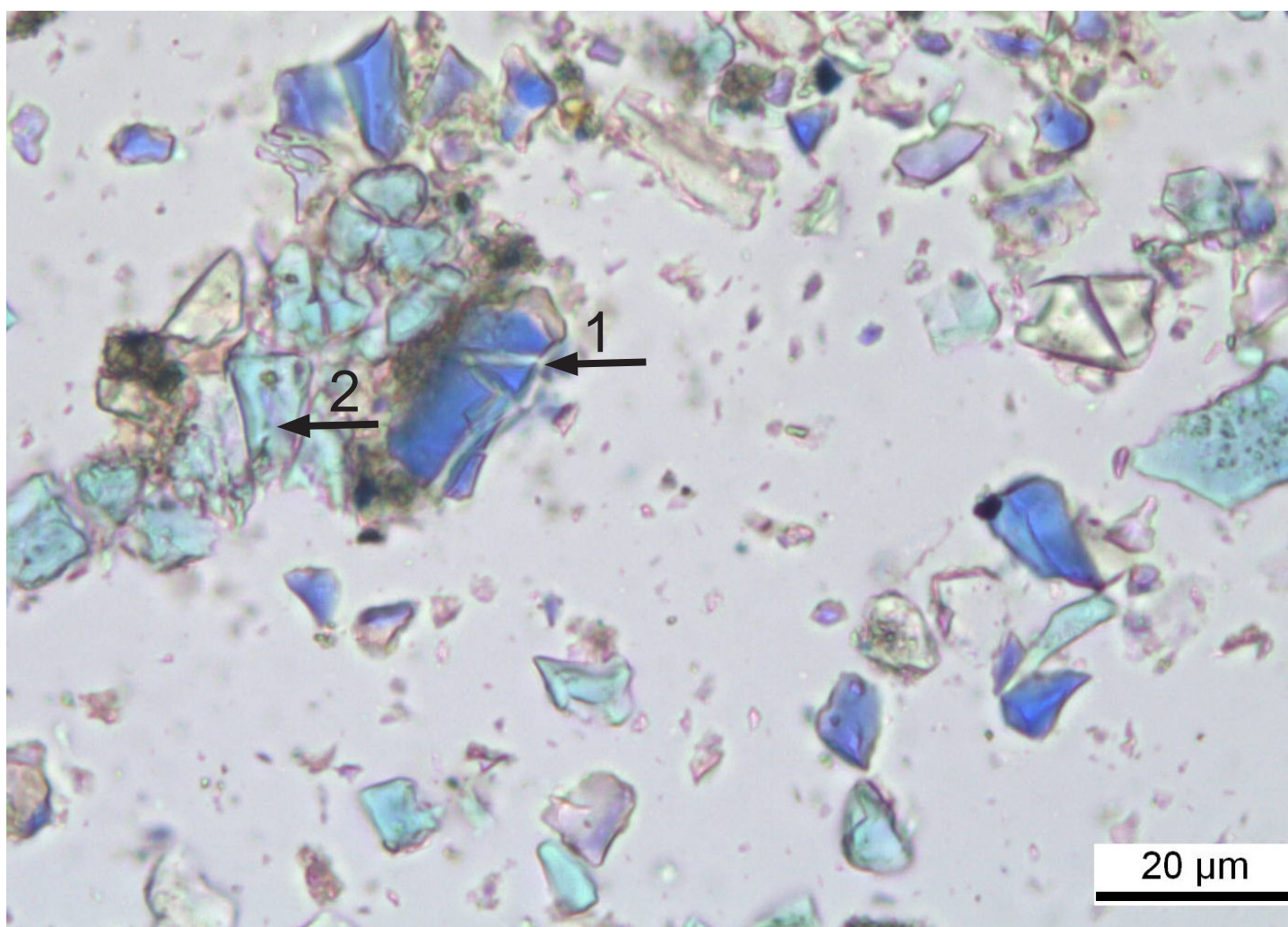
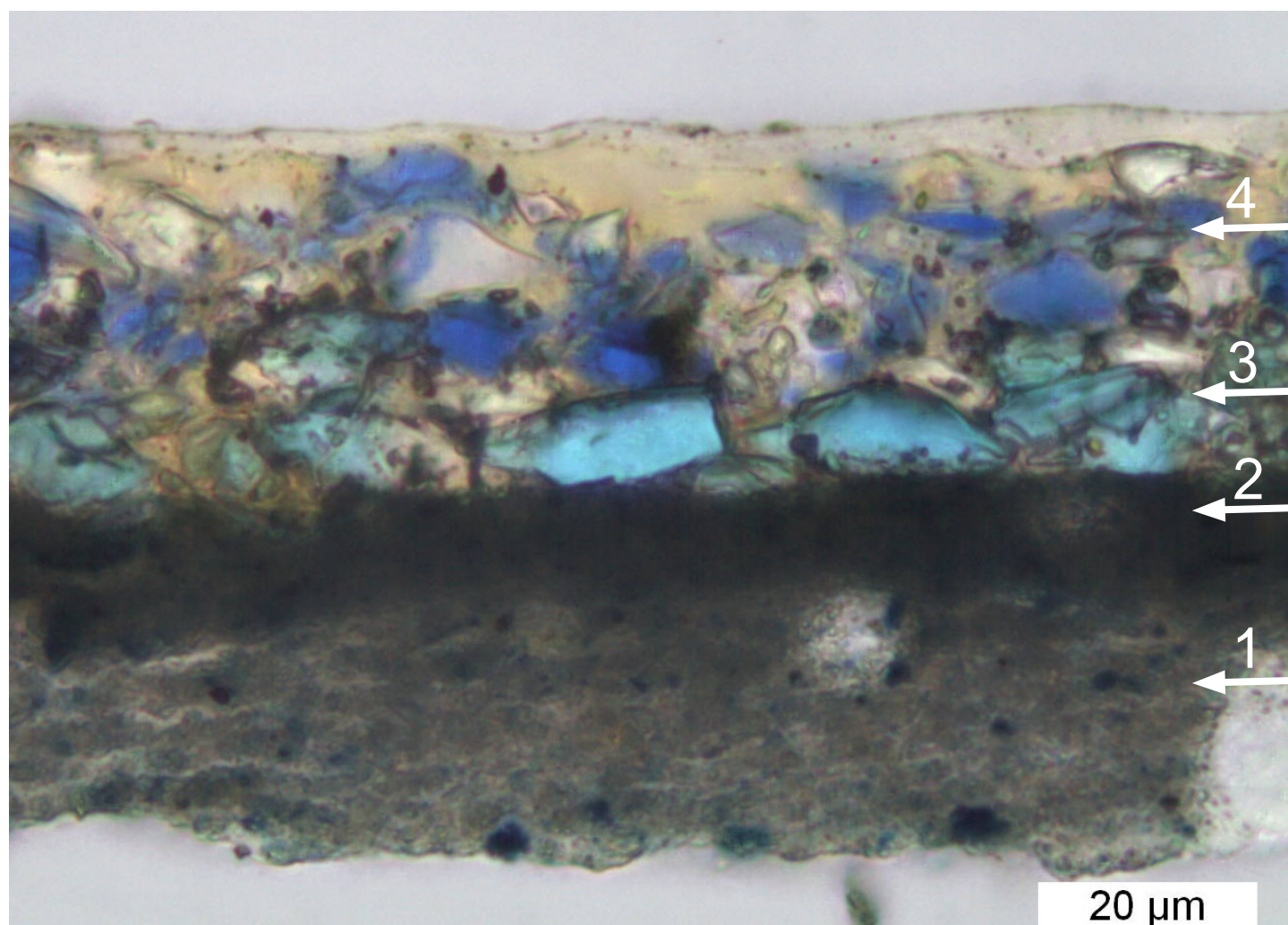
Ultramarine, obtained through a complex process of grinding and purifying lapis lazuli, was a very valuable pigment. Cennino Cennini, in the early fifteenth century, describes ultramarine as “a color illustrious, beautiful, and most perfect, beyond all other colors” [Cennini, chap. LXII, translated by Thompson/New Haven 1933].

Cross section of the blue paint layers of the cross, transmitted light

- 4 lapis lazuli
- 3 azurite
- 2 lead white and indigo
- 1 lead white and indigo

pigments in polarized light

- 1 lapis lazuli
- 2 azurite



The blood of Christ



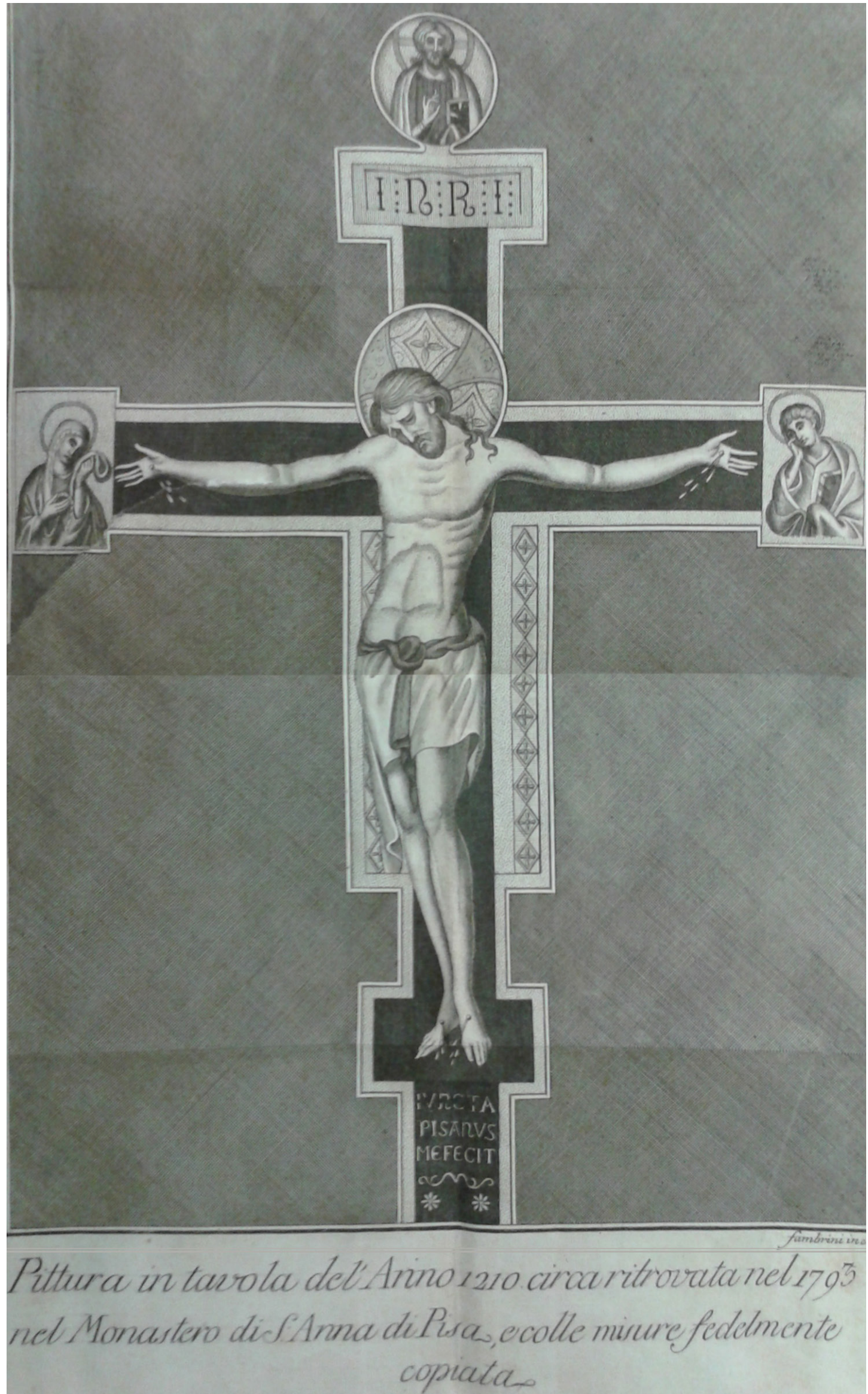
The nails in the hands and feet are painted as black circles. From the nails the blood runs down to the edge of the blue cross in two streams and forms a thickening knot there. The side wound is gushing streams of blood (red) and water (white). The blood is painted red (probably cinnabar) and shaded with layers of red lacquer.

Changes and restoration



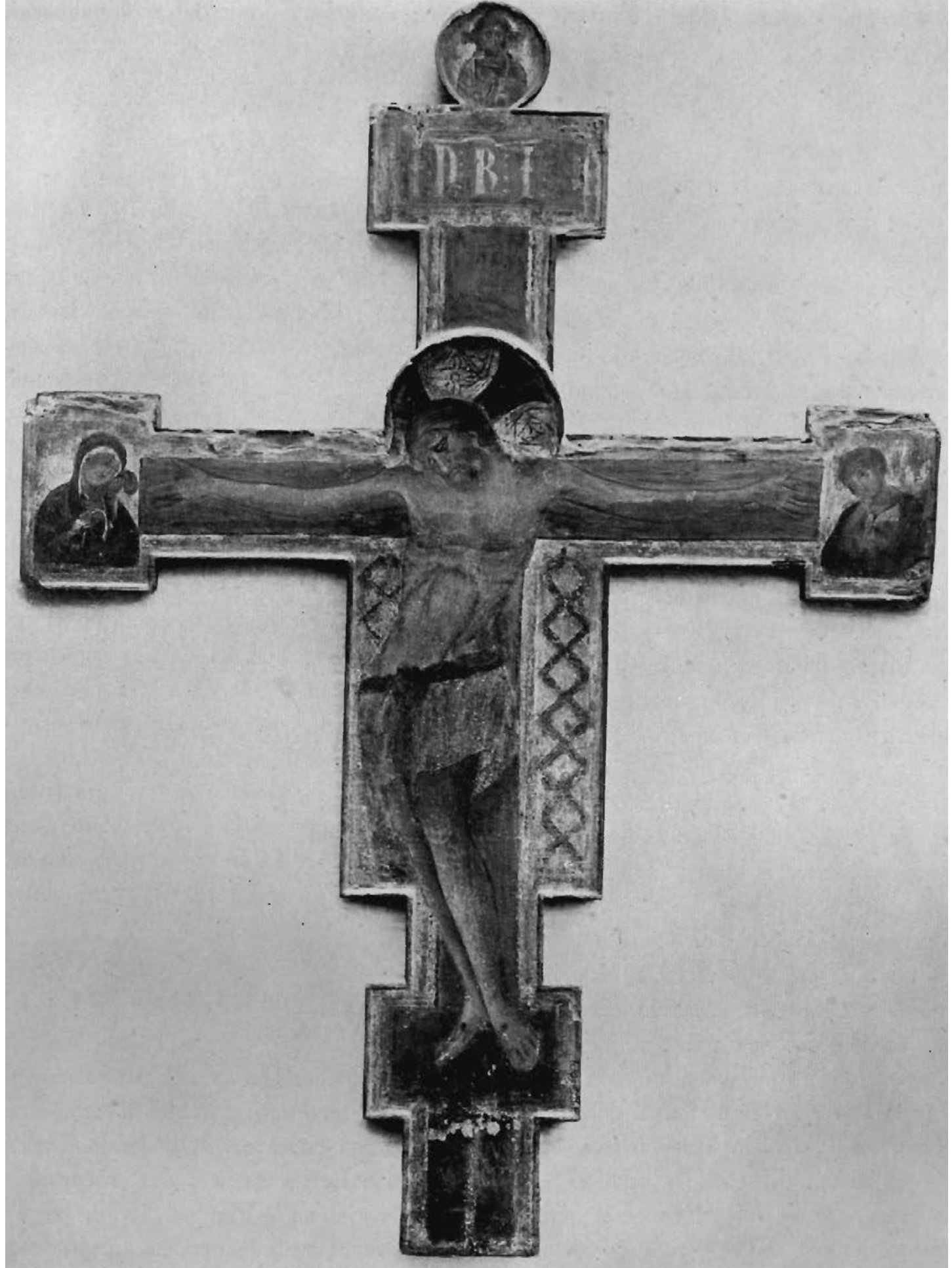
Saint John

Detail image of the carefully obtained flesh tones



1814 engraving by Di Morrone

Photograph from 1924



The cross was subjected to a profound reworking during a restoration, which is not documented but must have taken place before 1814.

The garments of the mourners, the INRI-panel, the loincloth of Christ and parts of the nimbus were repainted. The flesh colours of the mourners were carefully spared from this reworking and therefore remain original. The garments were scraped off and repainted on a new primer.

The photograph of 1924 documents historic repaintings on the lateral panels, which were removed during a restoration in the years 1947-48.

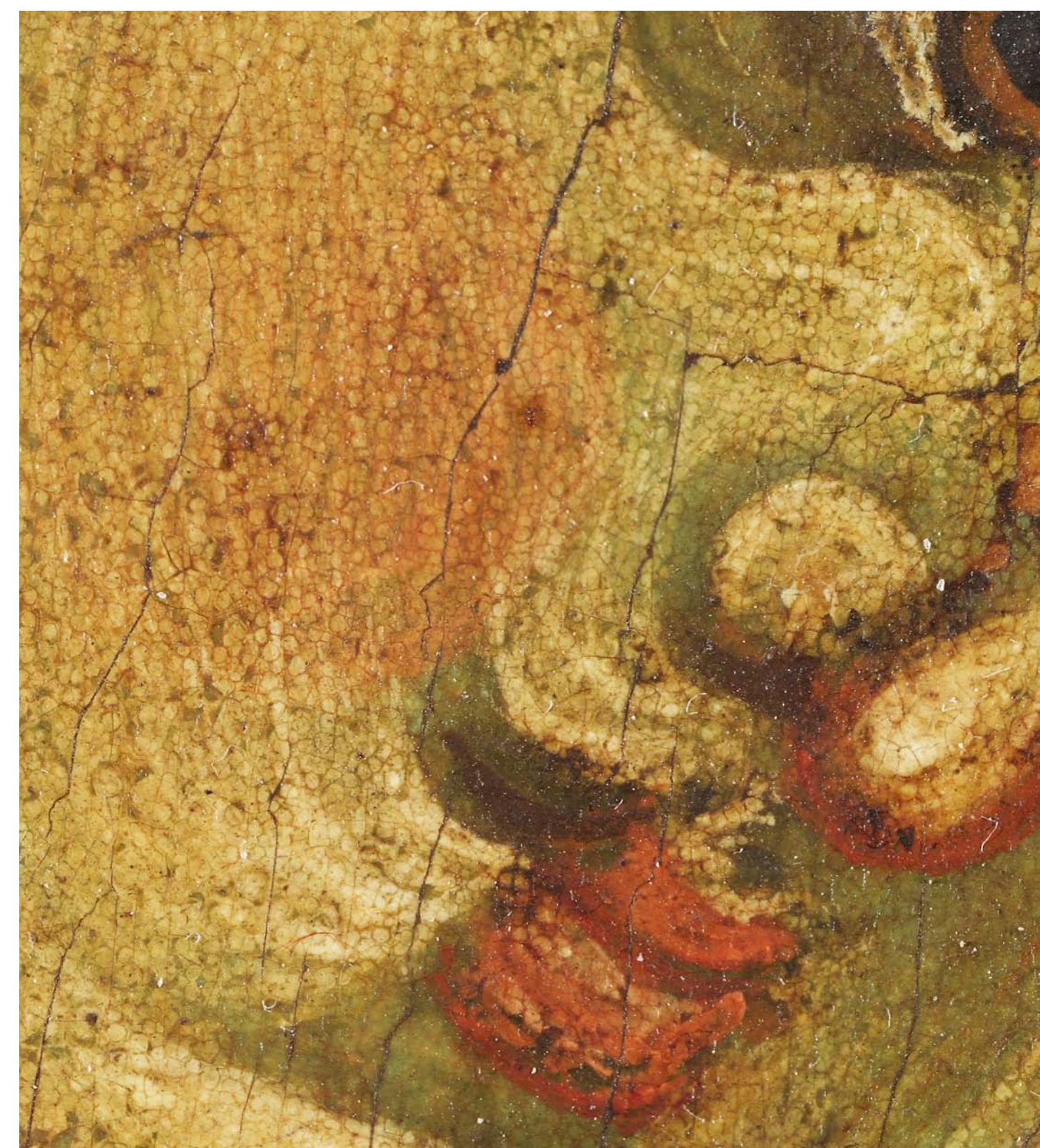
Croce Dipinta by Giunta di Capitino, called Giunta Pisano, ca. 1250

Provenance: Pisa, Chiesa di Sant'Anna, later Chiesa di San Ranierino, 185 x 135 cm

The flesh tones

A visible underpainting of verdeterra, a cold green-coloured pigment obtained from the minerals glauconite and celadonite, was covered with different flesh colours using fine brush strokes to mold the faces of the figures and the body of Christ. The colours for the flesh were obtained from different mixtures of lead white with *verdaccio* and of lead white with cinnabar.

Verdaccio was a colour made from yellow ocher, a small amount of black, white, and a touch of red. The *verdaccio* was used to create shadows, with the *verdeterra* shining through in places. After the painter applied the shadows, lighter zones were created, “making it gradually lighter, in a careful way, until you finally come to touch in with pure white lead” [Cennini, chap. CXLVII, translated by Thompson/New Haven 1933] in the most protruding body parts, as for example the nose. A brown line was applied afterward to surround the form of the face and body.



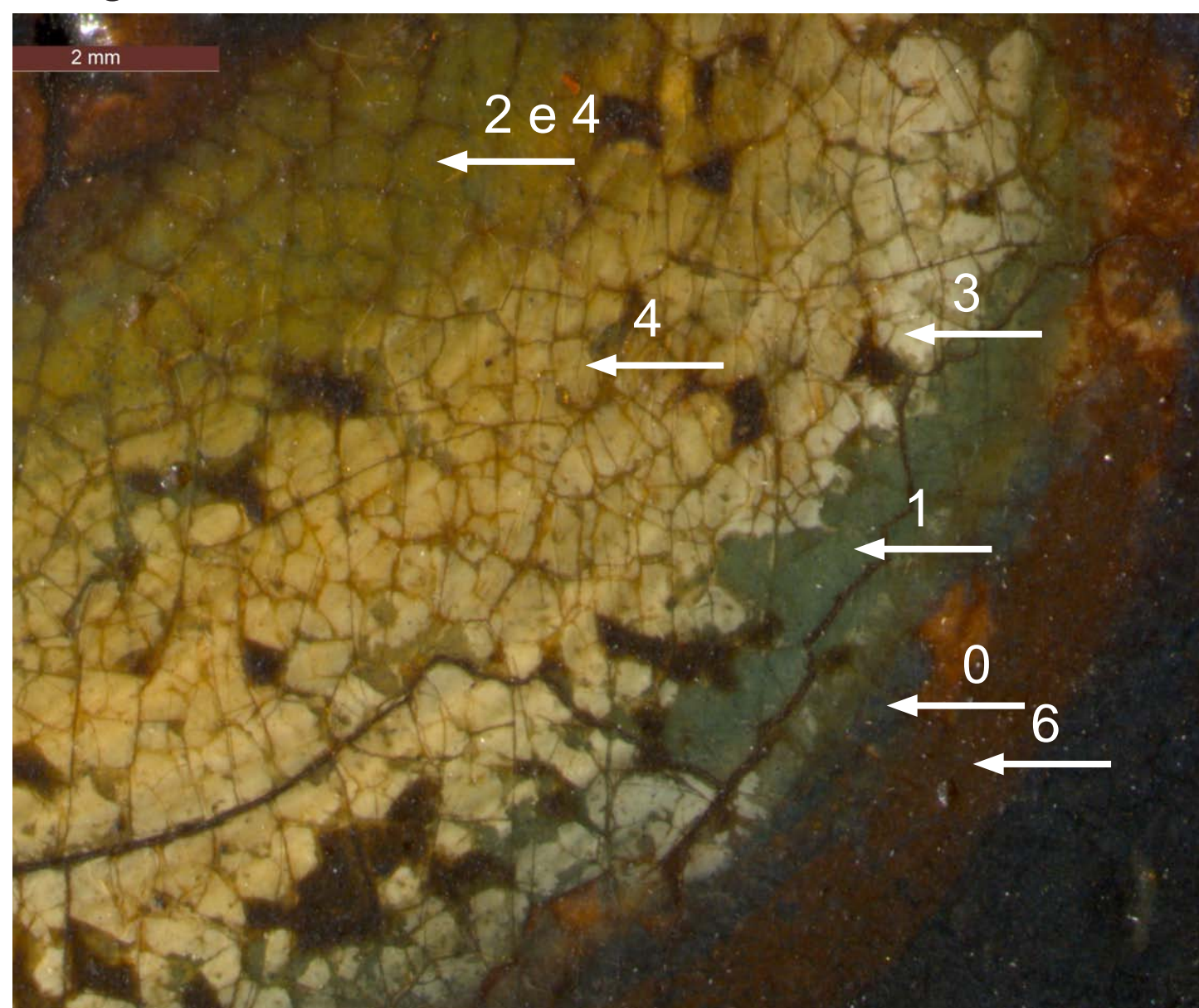
Detail of the cheek and mouth of Mary with a rosy complexion

The face of Mary



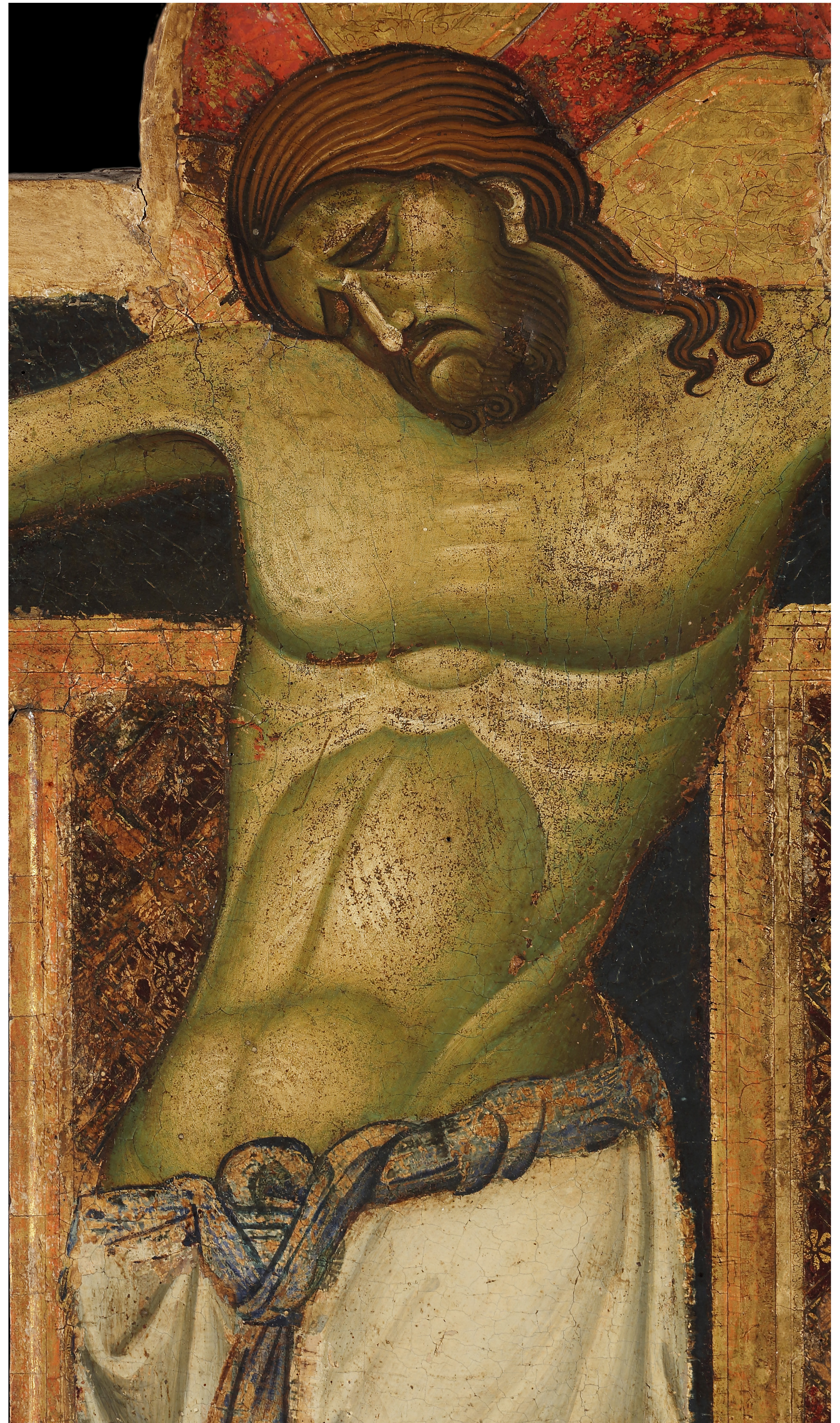
The left hand of Christ

The red frame in the upper image marks the detail of the thumb enhanced through the microscopic image below



Sequence of the elaboration of the flesh colours. The colour blue (0) of the cross was applied before the flesh colours.

- 1 underpainting of verdeterra under the flesh colours;
- 2 verdeterra mixed with white, under a translucent layer of *verdaccio* (4);
- 3 thin brushstrokes of *verdaccio*;
- 4 translucent layer of *verdaccio* on flesh colours;
- 5 contour line of the thumb in brown colour.



Detail image of the eyes and the nose of Christ

Detail image in UV light, documenting the presence of a varnish

